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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ

#### Summary

-- Lead stories in all papers today, April 10, report on the fall of the Iraqi regime in Baghdad. Subdued front-page headlines highlight the American forces' control over the Iraqi capital and the "puzzling" absence of Iraqi leadership figures. Reports also focus on scenes of the Iraqi people's jubilation, looting, and demolishing of monuments of the Iraqi regime that took place in some Iraqi cities. Front pages of two Arabic dailies carried the photo of Saddam Hussein's statue as it was draped with the American flag in Baghdad by U.S. soldiers. All papers also highlight King Abdullah's call for a "national effort" to help the Iraqi people and to provide immediate medical and food assistance. The editorial commentary today can be described as bewildered and bitter.

#### Editorial Commentary

-- "Why?"

Daily columnist Bader Wardam writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (04/10): "It might be too hard for the mind to function under these circumstances, and yet, the question that is asked by every Arab, the question that is addressed to all governments, politicians and regular citizens is this: why did the Iraqis prefer the occupation over staying under the authority of the regime? It is a hard lesson that must be understood by some of the Arab regimes. Managing a country with an iron fist and violating people's freedoms may give the impression of steadfast stability, but at the first challenge, the falseness goes away and the truth that the people are so far away from the regime and that their only hope is getting rid of the oppression, even through an occupier, becomes clear. These are difficult times for the Arabs outside Iraq, those who are probably more shocked than the Iraqis themselves. This is because we were listening to fiery speeches and have failed to understand the reality of the Iraqi people's feelings and suffering.. The Iraqi feelings now are those of redemption and salvation, and as such are not logical. The reality, however, is that of an occupation and that will take time to be absorbed by the Iraqis. I wonder how they will deal with the American occupation presence in the days to come and how they will handle it when they find out that they were moved from a dictatorship to an occupation."

-- "The surprise/the puzzle"

Daily columnist Urayb Rintawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (04/10): "By all standards, we view the 'battle' of Baghdad as a puzzle and a surprise. The battle, over which the whole world held its breath, did not happen, and the collapse was quick and horrific. It may be a long time before we learn the facts of what went on.. If we had the courage, we would say that the final outcome of the war was expected from the beginning. We would also say that we had wished the war would have taken a different turn, for America's arrogance could only be broken by the strikes of the resistance and major losses. And this, unfortunately, did not happen."

-- "America bombs Palestine in Baghdad!"

Daily columnist Hilmi Al-Asmar writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (04/10): "America and Israel alone are reproducing colonization in its original form, and alone maintain the most brutal of human heritage, namely the occupation.. America and Israel are two 'states' whose laws are founded upon the concept of the 'colonizer' that rejects human laws.. We, in Jordan,

stand now between two Sharons, to the east and to the west, and thus must prepare for the worst, which is yet to come."

-- "Between Gaza and Baghdad"

Columnist Usama Sharif writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (04/10): "Killing reporters on purpose to scare others and drive them away from Baghdad reminds us of Israel and its crimes in Palestine. Yesterday, America committed a heinous crime against the media and this day should never be forgotten.. Between this occupation [U.S. occupation of Iraq] and that [Israel's occupation of Palestine], much blood is spilled, while mouths keep quiet, and we only see the desperate faces of leaders bragging about justice and freedom that they bring to whomever they choose and withhold from whomever they choose.. The Bush-Blair meeting in Northern Ireland is a new Yalta meeting that precedes a new Potsdam in Baghdad. There were no Iraqis present at the meeting. There was no need to bring in the Iraqis, for these are issues to be determined at a level higher than that of the people concerned. I have never heard such nonsense as that being uttered by Blair and Bush. What freedom, independence and justice is this? The price of usurping Iraq is high. Lives lost, money squandered and a campaign gone bad. Where do they come up with this nonsense? How did America and Britain become a new Israel? How did America fall down this way and smeared itself with the blood of the innocent? Is this the answer to the September 11 attacks? Has the war machine vindicated itself by spilling the blood of the Iraqis? America and Israel are equal now and the occupation in both cases is a sick impression of the downfall of civilization and morality. May the Americans and the British enjoy this victory of theirs, for it shall be a crown of thorns that would bloody their foreheads. In the heart of what is left of this nation boils a blind anger that would condemn to damnation everything around it and forebears a long-awaited volcano. They have badly wounded Iraq, but they have not killed it. History may do injustice to the victim but its legacy shall never have mercy on the executioner."

-- "Is it a play?"

Daily columnist Sultan Hattab writes on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (04/10): "Amman cried hard over what it witnessed. Amman cried over the fall of Baghdad as it did the fall of Jerusalem. It has become our destiny to cry the fall of capitals, cities and dignity and to be shoved from one defeat to another. The tragedy is repeated; one defeat after another; one treachery after another; one betrayal after another. The invaders come across the seas to liberate, to rule, to divide and to impose a status quo. It has reached the point where Arabs cannot differentiate between an occupation and a liberation. The capital of the Abassid Caliphate is now in the hands of the soldiers and Baghdad sinks into occupation, as it did at the hands of Holako [emperor of the Mongols]. Tears and pain will do us no good, for these are the tears of the helpless and the pains of those suffering from defeat. We used to believe that if a person believes in his homeland, he would not give up to the death. But is there anyone who believes in the homeland, or does the homeland become worthless when its people are turned into slaves? Where is the Iraqi resistance? Where is the translation of all the words we have heard over the long years? Where are the millions, the weapons, the slogans? They have disappeared into thin air. How does Jabalia [refugee camp in Gaza] fight Israeli tanks for months on end with hands armed only with willpower, faith and the love of the homeland, and Baghdad does not? Baghdad is now losing its head, its memory and its history, and in its name much will be signed, before it wakes up. Baghdad is a prisoner and the prisoner does not represent himself. Talking about its freedom is an illusion. Baghdad will sign on to many accords, to which death may be easier. Sharon will be waiting for these signatures and for other things. With the disappearance of old Baghdad, many teams from the Arab world may also disappear. The only beneficiary from this war that led to the occupation of Iraq is Israel, the right-wing Likud and Sharon. Iraq's occupation will be President Bush's gift to them. The awakening of the drunk is inevitable and we shall see how tables will turn and how the meaning of the word liberation shall glitter."

GNEHM